Director’s News

Preschool Room Activities
The preschoolers enjoyed a performance of the Peking Acrobats last week at the Orpheum Theater. Next month they will attend a concert given by the African Children’s choir. The teachers taking advantage of the diverse opportunities offered in the city to expand the children’s cultural experiences.

Preschool Room Staffing
We hired Annie Sweeney as the assistant teacher in the preschool room. Annie most recently worked for the Westside Community Schools Early Childhood Centers. She holds a degree in Elementary and Special Education. Annie will attend Creighton University Orientation on February 23 and will begin in the preschool room on the 24.

Delois Neal-Lee has resigned effective March 2. Please join us in celebrating her years of service at her retirement party on March 24 from 3-5:30.

Pat Pulsifer enjoyed her retirement parties. Several former staff members came to the staff party and many former students came to the party at the Center.

Valentine’s Day Activities
The preschoolers made a large Valentine for the people at Sodexho who cook and deliver our food. They presented it to Glenn Fisher who is our delivery person. The toddlers presented a Valentine to our mail carrier, Bruce Karlquist and left a Valentine for Liu Bu, the ES employee who cleans our building at night. These activities help raise the children’s awareness of those in the Creighton community who help us at the Center.

Family Survey
The link to the annual Family Survey was e-mailed on Friday to families on Friday, February 13. The survey is on Blue Q. We need to have at least 50% participation in the survey for re-accreditation. We accommodated the few families who preferred a paper copy of the survey. Katie and I will share survey results with all families.

Holiday Bazaar Funds
The Holiday Bazaar proceeds have been spent on the following:

- New multi-cultural equipment for the toddler room (costumes, rhythm instruments, Japanese tea set).
- New microwaves for the kitchen and the infant room, replacing two that were 15 years old.
- Chair replacement – we purchased 18 new children’s chairs to replaced one with cracked seats. The old chairs were donated to a church.

Connie
Feeding your young child – suggestions for healthy meals for busy parents

Parents know that a healthy diet is vital to a child’s growth and development, but preparing food after a long day at work can be discouraging. Often, the child is ready to eat when he/she arrives home, but the food and parent are not ready. Here are a few child-friendly meal suggestions for the busy parent.

Meat is not only an important protein but also an essential source of iron for children who need this mineral as they grow. Make sure that your child has a good source of iron by serving him/her a variety of meats. Many children prefer their meat and side dishes to be distinct – not mixed together. We expose children to enchiladas, chicken potpie, chili, and tuna and noodles and most of them learn to like them over time. You can purchase these foods freshly made from your store’s deli.

For families who do not eat meat, please ask your child’s pediatrician about providing another source of iron. Options for meals without meat could include: red beans and rice (purchase this in a mix in the rice section of your store), cooked pasta with grated cheese sprinkled over the top (stay away from the Kraft mac and cheese – this would be much less nutritious), grilled cheese sandwich (use a whole milk cheese such as a mild cheddar), or cheese ravioli (buy the fresh type in the refrigerated case or the frozen ones) with marinara sauce. We serve these at the Center and the children eat them well. Soy burgers, crumbled soy patty, or tofu can also provide your child with the protein he/she needs. Believe it or not, the tofu generally goes over pretty well with the children!

Make sure that you do not overwhelm your child by completely filling his/her plate. We encourage the children to choose their portion and that is a good idea for at least one of the foods you offer at every meal. Indicate to your child that he/she may have another serving if they wish.

For a nutritious dinner, try serving your child a plate with some of the following:

• Use your favorite store’s deli for prepared meat, such as meatballs, meatloaf, baked chicken and turkey, and pork loin. Buy a small amount to see if your child will like it, then rotate some of these items by freezing them in child-size portions.

• Check out the prepared meat section of your store’s dairy cases. Here you can also buy cooked meat that you can freeze and use small amounts at a time.

• Buy bags of loose veggies and serve at least one or two to your child in the evening. Two vegetables and one serving each of meat and bread will make a great meal. You could offer a fruit at the end of the meal. (Remember that the USDA guidelines suggest 5 servings a day of vegetables and fruit.) By varying the meat and the vegetables, you can offer your child meals that he/she will enjoy. We offer your child vegetables (including peas, carrots, green beans, mixed vegetables, corn, and broccoli) at every lunch at the Center. Most of the children eat them well.

For more ideas, you can find our Center menu on our website under the “Playground Kitchen” heading. All of our meals are low sodium and low/no sugar (and still very tasty). Please share your child’s favorite meals with us and we will pass them on to other families in upcoming newsletters. You can e-mail Katie or me with your ideas.

Connie
We are looking for spring and it should be right around the corner. The children enjoyed watching the snow come down the other day. It was fun to watch them scoop and brush away the snow. They were excited to see Will’s mom Jessica outside scooping. They were on the lookout each time someone came to work on the sidewalks in hopes of seeing Jessica again.

The activity table was used in many ways this past month. Water play was at the top of the list. One day Lynn found a child size pitcher and the children poured water from the pitcher into cups. You could see the concentration on their faces as they tried to complete this task. This activity worked on eye hand coordination. Sometimes it was fun just watching the water pour and splash into the big tub of water.

I would like to thank everyone that was able to make the parent-teacher conferences. I enjoyed visiting with each of you. If you have not had a conference, I would like to set one up with you very soon.

As I mentioned in our conference, Lynn, Gina and I use CreativeCurriculum.net to record our observations of the children. We try to observe the children doing a variety of activities. By doing this we can get a more complete picture of your child. Every other week the three of us review our observations of the children and make an assessment of where each child is developmentally. At that time we will create a lesson plan for two weeks. The lesson plan will include activities from many developmental areas, such as, physical, social/emotional, cognitive, or language development. When we need a little help in specific areas CreativeCurriculum.net has a wonderful tool for lesson planning. The site provides us with activities for each developmental area from simple to more complex. Our goal is to match our curriculum to your child’s development in ways that challenge, interest, and stimulate him/her.

We would like to thank parents for sharing your child’s favorite cd’s for our music time. It is fun to hear what the children like to listen at home. You are welcome to bring in music at any time. Here are the words to the chant “Fried Ham” that we do quite often.

Fried Ham, Fried Ham, Cheese and Bologna
After the macaroni, we’ll have onions, pickles and pretzels,
Then we’ll have some more Fried Ham, Fried Ham.

We will use different styles for our verses, such as Football style (pump our fists), underwater (move finger over lips), and hold our nose for stinky style

Our younger infants have new achievements to share. Caden is cruising around the room holding onto anything he can as he walks. Connor has started taking steps on his own. Rowan and Fletch can get to a sitting position from their tummy, and they are both close to crawling.

Jackie has started visiting the toddler room, and Caitlin will visit next month.

Shanna, Lynn, Gina
We’ve kicked off the New Year in the toddler room by getting back to the basics. Over the past several weeks, we covered the subject areas of colors, numbers, shapes, and the ABC's. We also talked about shadows and how they are cast, during the week that Groundhog’s Day was celebrated.

With the sun in mind, and in recent days, we’ve been able to enjoy the great outdoors. Mother Nature has afforded several beautiful days for us to take advantage of. The toddlers have been excited to get out for an occasional walk, and are having fun getting re-acquainted with the playground.

A new activity that we introduced after the first of the year is Yoga. We have used it as a successful transition from morning centers to lunchtime. It has been a positive addition to our routine, and the toddlers are always happy to participate. Ask your child to do a “sun salutation” or a “downward facing dog” pose for you.

We would like to thank you for all for attending conferences. We appreciate and applaud the connection between home and school. In the conference process, teachers are able to convey thoughts about development and growth through observation and assessment. We also get to know parents better while finding out about home routines and discipline practices. It is an opportunity to share ideas about effective strategies that help maintain a balance that is consistent for the child. We appreciate your patience and enthusiasm as we have been learning and implementing the assessment process, and then in turn presenting it to you as related to each individual child. Our hope is that you learned some things about your toddler and how they are progressing through the steps on the developmental continuum.

The assessment process also allows us to provide a measure of our own curriculum; a system of checks and balances, if you will. By using this tool, we can see the strengths of the classroom, while observing what skills are lacking. We can then adjust accordingly as we plan our daily activities.

To end, I would like to quote a brief excerpt from an article by J.P. Shonkoff and D. A. Phillips entitled, “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood.”

“In the last 10 years, an explosion of brain research about children’s first 5 years of life has documented the profound influence of early experiences upon children’s cognitive development. An investigation of neurobiology, behavioral and social sciences concluded that what happens in the first 5 years of life absolutely matters. This period provides a foundation that will support a child all the way into adulthood. The course of a child’s development can be altered through effective early childhood instruction.”

It is our great fortune to facilitate a portion of this foundation for your children.

Laura, DuRell, and Erin
Dear Parents,

We enjoyed having conferences with you! It is great to share the success and growth we see in working with your child each day. By communicating with you we can also learn more about individual children and develop ways we can work with parents to promote learning.

During your child’s day, we teachers observe your child while he/she works, plays and interacts with others. We use these observations along with the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum to guide us in making the observation process systematic. We collect notes that relate to all 51 Creative Curriculum objectives. These objective fit within four developmental domains, including social emotional development, physical development, cognitive development, or language development. One observation often covers several objectives.

After we look over the observations, we use the Developmental Continuum as a tool for planning instruction and assessing learning. The information gained from observing the children and thinking about their developmental level is the basis for supporting their learning appropriately. It also helps us set reasonable goals for each child. Our goal is to teach the whole child and to make preschool a fun and rewarding experience.

The last couple of weeks we have encouraged our preschoolers to use art materials independently. They have learned many techniques, such as stroking with a paint brush and using the right amount of glue. They are showing they are capable of using a variety of materials and can create some nice art work. Many children are taking the initiative to draw, cut, color and print. We are pleased with their efforts and will encourage them to continue to work.

The children were excited about our trip to see the Peking Acrobats at the Orpheum Theater on Thursday, February 12th. We centered several of our activities to relate to the Performance. We also prepared for Valentine’s Day. The children decorated bags in preparation for their cards. They traced and decorated hearts and we shared several friendship books.

In March we plan to see the African Children’s Choir at the Orpheum and Petite Rouge “Red Riding Hood” at the Rose Theater. We welcome parents who would like to attend.

We have had some unseasonably warm days and have enjoyed going outside. We intend to keep the children motivated and actively involved in learning throughout the winter.

Shari, Keon and Annie